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Annual ministerial review: implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women

Statement submitted by Sisters of Charity Federation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2010/100.

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Statement

The Millennium Development Goals: water, sanitation and women

Mobilizing and increasing the effective use of financial resources and achieving the national and international economic conditions needed to fulfil internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, to eliminate poverty, improve social conditions and raise living standards, and protect our environment, will be our first step to ensuring that the twenty-first century becomes the century of development for all (Monterrey Consensus, 2002).

The blatant shortfall in crucial action steps towards the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals remains a troubling concern for many non-governmental organizations and members of civil society. Current statistics indicate that approximately 1 billion people lack safe and/or adequate drinking water and some 2.6 billion are without adequate sanitation. This is not to negate the progress that has been made where safe drinking water and sanitation have been provided and maintained since global community awareness and concern led to Government initiatives in some countries, along with partnerships garnering cooperation, funding, and knowledge from non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, business and industry, the private sector, and educational and technical institutions. According to figures gathered from 1990 to 2006 and released by the United Nations Children's Fund in November 2009, 1.6 billion people have access to improved drinking water.

Development of water and sanitation systems in rural and urban areas would alleviate poverty, contribute to overall food security, assure health benefits for the general population (eradication of diarrhoea diseases), free the girl child for attendance in school, and women for more sustainable activity (education, jobs, community involvement towards protection and management of the water/sanitation system, etc.), and assist in achieving environmental sustainability.

We urge greater effort on the part of all stakeholders to provide adequate, safe drinking water and sanitation to meet the target of halving the number of those living in extreme poverty by 2015. A non-governmental organizations major group discussion paper on water, sanitation and human settlements indicated that it had been well established that women were vital links in the sustainability chain. Additionally, it had been proved time and time again that any activity at the local level that did not involve and empower women was a non-starter and bound to fail. No issue in sustainable development was more relevant to women than water and sanitation.

Women need to be partners in the water-sanitation projects from the very beginning. These projects must be adapted to local situations and must include a total water and sanitation management system. Beneficiaries need to be involved at all levels, beginning with construction. Tools to learn how to use, maintain, repair and keep the system safe must be provided. Education, especially hygiene education and behaviour modification will be essential to assure the effectiveness and success of the system. Such systems will accommodate the needs of the community and of individual families.

Funding for water/sanitation/management system projects could be garnered from any one of several financing for development sources. However, at this time we are recommending that Governments consider initiating new funding sources for international development revenues, such as the financial transaction tax.